

News from Rep. Stephanie Herseth
For Immediate Release
Contact: Russ Levsen, 202-226-4449

HERSETH VOTES AGAINST CUTS TO SOUTH DAKOTA FIRST RESPONDERS

Bill Does Not Reflect Needs of Rural America

May 12, 2005, Washington, D.C. – U.S. Rep. Stephanie Herseth today voted against legislation that would cut funding for South Dakota first responders. The bill, H.R. 1544, would change the distribution formula of certain first responder grants to require that the grants be distributed based primarily on threat levels, disregarding the unique challenges presented by geographically large and disparately populated rural areas like South Dakota.

The bill also reduces the minimum guaranteed funding for these grants from 0.75% to 0.25% of total funding available for states like South Dakota, that lack major metropolitan areas or an international border. This means millions of dollars in lost funding for South Dakota first responders including police and firefighters.

Herseth said, “This bill unfairly strips needed funding from rural states like South Dakota. While I recognize the great need to secure large cities and borders, we shouldn’t compromise the security of people in rural America. First responders in South Dakota face unique challenges in carrying out their duties. They are called upon time and time again to perform heroic work in dangerous circumstances, and we need to ensure they have adequate resources to do their job.”

In 2004 South Dakota received almost \$20 million in Homeland Security grants. If the minimum funding level had been .25%, South Dakota would have received an estimated \$6.7 million – a difference of more than \$13 million. Herseth noted that these cuts would make it even more difficult for smaller communities to adequately deal with the increased costs of keeping South Dakota safe.

“After September 11, the federal government mandated our police, sheriffs, firefighters and emergency medical technicians to take on additional responsibilities,” Herseth noted. “Yet now, the federal government is dramatically cutting the funds available to communities in South Dakota. That’s not only unfair, it’s bad policy.”

Herseth noted that a potential Al Queda operative Zacarias Moussaoui received his training in Minnesota, a state neighboring South Dakota.

###